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The governors of the Great Lakes states and Ontario officials have agreed to all but ban pumping water out of the Great Lakes basin, home to a fifth of the world's fresh water, a resource expected to grow more precious in coming decades.

The pact, to be signed Tuesday in Milwaukee, would ban new or increased diversions of water from the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River to other watersheds outside that drainage area, conference officials say.

The agreement formalizes how water from the lakes can be used while also requiring states and provinces to implement water-conservation programs and other steps.

The diversion issue has been at the forefront of Great Lakes conservation. It has made battlegrounds out of suburban areas on the cusp of the lakes' drainage area, where they have sought to import Great Lakes water just a few hundred yards for municipal use.

"These agreements will secure both environmental and economic stability in the region by protecting our most precious natural resource," Ohio Gov. Bob Taft, co-chairman of the Council of Great Lakes Governors, said Monday.

The international water-use pact, a finalized version of the Annex 2001 agreement, now needs to be ratified by state legislatures, Canadian provincial authorities and ultimately the U.S. Congress.

It seeks to regulate how much water is removed from the 288,000-square-mile Great Lakes drainage basin, an area containing the largest body of fresh water in the world.

Under the agreement, municipalities would be eligible to seek exemptions if they are in counties straddling the edge of the Great Lakes basin or are straddling the basin themselves, said David Naftzger, executive director of the Council of Great Lakes Governors.

Among the communities whose counties are split by the basin are Lowell, Ind., and Milwaukee suburb Waukesha, Wis. Communities such as New Berlin, Wis., and Ft. Wayne, Ind., are directly bisected by the basin.

In Illinois, where the largest diversion of Great Lakes water occurs, the basin's rim follows a rise in the ground closely hugging the Lake Michigan shore from the Wisconsin border to Northwest Indiana.

What's known as the Chicago diversion, which supplies water to DuPage County and other municipalities just outside the lake's basin, is grandfathered in and protected by Supreme Court rulings a century old.

The move by the governors comes at a busy time for the Great Lakes.

On Monday, Taft joined a partnership of federal, state and local governments, as well as environmental groups and private agencies, to announce in Chicago a \$20 billion plan to clean up the Great Lakes.

For the first time, the leaders said, it put on the same page government and environmental parties who had pushed for separate priorities to preserve and restore the lakes for decades.

But Monday's plan also left unanswered how the \$20 billion plan would be funded, with environmental groups, state governors and mayors placing their hopes on unpromised money in the 2007 federal budget.

The announcement was the result of a yearlong push to unify cleanup efforts called for by

President Bush during the 2004 election.

The plan, to be implemented over 15 years, includes measures to keep invasive species from the lakes, upgrade sewage systems, decontaminate toxic hot spots, improve rivers, and restore hundreds of thousands of acres of wetlands around the Great Lakes.

Its final cost will be split between private foundations and federal, state and municipal governments.

The level of federal commitment remained unclear. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency administrator Steve Johnson said Monday his agency would focus on streamlining existing programs rather than seeking new money.

Taft and Mayor Richard Daley, who joined Johnson in announcing the plan Monday at the John G. Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, said they have called on the Bush administration for \$300 million to fund short-term projects.

They and environmental groups hope the White House will put the amount into its 2007 federal budget proposal in February.

Reps. Vernon Ehlers (R-Mich.), Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) and Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) suggested Congress should push for cleanup measures left unfunded by the administration.

But Ehlers, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Environment, Technology and Standards, later said initial hopes to fully fund those requests had been dashed by the cost of rebuilding after a series of devastating hurricanes this year.

"We'll make sure that it's introduced. Now, whether or not Congress will take action is difficult to say," Ehlers said afterward.